

# Module: Perspectives on Arts as A Global Human Activity - Romantic Reality By Kengo Kuma an Exhibition Proposal V&A Museum

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## Abstract:

This proposal is based on the architect's openness to another form of presentation and thought process about the site as an appropriate for an architectural exhibition. In terms of this research, there are two separate notions summarized in – 'Anti-Environments' and 'Integrated-Environments'. The new curatorial rhetoric emphasis on audience participate, there is the pressure on process rather than product, with important placed on 'doing' and participate. Its temporality and unforced fluidity place is the curatorial methodology back the off-site work. Moreover, the thematic demand for visitors plays a relevant role on contemporary exhibition. Thus, contemporary curatorial practice has presented more new questions for curators to consider about them.

## Keywords:

Architect, Off-Site, Contemporary Curatorial Practice

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## 1. Introduction

This proposal relates to architectural designs and art that responds to an opportunity to curate a show for Kengo Kuma at the V&A museum (Illustrations 1). This paper will discuss the concept development in the proposal, and includes a discussion of the architect's background and his suitability for the project. Further to this, This paper will explain in detail how this relates to the context of the chosen architect's working practice and why his work would benefit from being exhibited in this way. This will also provide a consideration of "Off-site" curatorial practice theory, architectural history and design [1]. Moreover, the commissioning process is the most significant theme. This proposal is based on the architect's openness to another form of presentation and thought process about the site as an appropriate for an architectural exhibition.

## 2. Concept

*“Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair.” Bertrand Russell [12].*

The three passions claimed to be prevalent to Russell’s life have influenced generations of people. They were not only what Russell lived for basically but they are the basic philosophical and moral framework for all people and in my opinion it is important to apply these three passions to architectural exhibitions, as they represent a new notion in the architectural realms which is more emotional and all encompassing of human life. “The longing for love” is represented through the permanent utopian theme in people’s worlds and imagination of the future; “the search for knowledge” relates to the rational function and material of buildings; and “the unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind” which considers developing the current living environments. Thus, the architects’ work must understand large scale architectural issues and communicate an architects’ way of thinking and should be expressed through themes.

Hence, architectural exhibitions must allow for multiplicity, diversity and contradictions to exist inside the structure of an exhibition. They should focus on different issues, and all in all, communicate the three notions stated above.

Additionally, whether the three notions, “the permanent utopian topic of people’s worlds and perceptions of the future lives”, “the rational function and material of buildings”, or “developing the modern, inadequate living environments”, there is an inevitable issue about the environment and isolated architecture cannot exist. Kengo Kuma states that “Architecture of the body's own existence is shameful and I want an ambiguous outline of the building, that is, make the building disappear.” [13]

Such a statement means that people desire buildings to be carved out from the surrounding environment, without people forgetting that the architectural intention is to allow individuals to go to, live more comfortably, instead of blindly creating buildings as “objects”. Instead a building should be full of a variety of paintings and should permit the inhabitants to sign up to their own dream. Thus, the interactions between the building and environment play a relevant role in architectural design. Additionally, “the environment” is inclusive of both the natural environment and the artificial cities and villages surrounding it.

Thus, in terms of this research, there are two separate notions summarized in – “Anti-Environments” and “Integrated-Environments”.

Currently “anti-environments”, show how the world has entered a period of rapid economic growth as environments of the past and has not satisfied rapidly developing cities and can be seen in both Asia and Europe. For example, the pressure on East Asian cities has led to an increasing urbanization and densification during the last decade. “The Vertical Village” [15] (Illustrations 18,19) exhibition explores the rapid urban transformation in East Asia, the qualities of urban villages and the potential to realize this in a much denser, vertical way as a radical alternative to the monotonous block architecture with identical standard apartments and its consequences for the city. Moreover, in 2013 “IBA-HAMBURG” [15], as Wilhelmsburg which is the closest harbor to Hamburg, it is more known for its high unemployment rates and for having a very culturally diverse neighborhood, to shift the paradigm of being stigmatized as

an area only facing poverty and therefore the city of Hamburg saw a good opportunity. The goals and aims of these topics were focused on finding strategies to build better communities. Both architects and people wanted to change current inadequate living or working conditions. Thus, taking a variety of forms, the thinking and ideas of “Metabolism” [16] an architectural show which is still very much alive in architecture and urban design today, and has engaged in sharing the ability of living organisms to keep growing, reproducing, and transforming in response to its environment.

When considering ‘Integrated-Environments’, within the architecture realm there is a main concept is that they believe in designing structures being in harmony with humanity and its environment. They collected elements from nature, such as shapes, materials, light, and then applied them to modern buildings and cities. They used natural material to produce new work, finding structures from nature, and designing buildings in fitting with the surrounding environment [2].

Further to this, buildings play a supporting role, to the natural environment with the buildings themselves fusing with the ambiance of the vernacular. For instance, the famous Fallingwater or Kaufmann Residence [17] is a house designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright in 1935 in rural southwestern Pennsylvania. The home was built partly over a waterfall on Bear Run in the Mill Run section of Stewart Township, Fayette County, Pennsylvania, in the Laurel Highlands of the Allegheny Mountains and was hailed by Time shortly after its completion as Wright's "most beautiful job". Once Wright had decided on the location of the house, he had the obvious problem of building it there [3]. The location of the north bank of Bear Run was not large enough to provide a foundation for a typically built Wright house but then he combined the building with its natural surroundings to solve the problem perfectly. Hence, architects were imaginative artists who found their main inspiration always returned to nature.

However, this proposal will focus on a main theme “An integration of nature” and invite a Japanese-based architect Kengo Kuma to make a solo exhibition to explain how buildings are related to the Asian collectivist perception of nature. Following this, the word ‘Romantic Reality’ which is becoming a symbolic title for the exhibition. The cause of this is people are always feeling romantic and satisfied in spiritual when they are living in a natural brilliant environment, instead of living in the modern cement cube. Fortunately, the Japanese architect Kengo Kuma are engaging in building modern architectures from natural elements. The dream of living in natural environment with natural objects can be realized. The reason and sensibility are not always opposite. To integrate rational and romantic, make people see the world full of truth, or the integrity of architecture.

### **3. V&A Museum**

The Victoria and Albert Museum (often abbreviated as the V&A) [18], located in London, UK, is the world's largest museum of decorative arts and design, housing a permanent collection of over 4.5 million objects. It was founded in 1852 and named after Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Essentially, in 2004 RIBA and the V&A opened the first museum gallery in the country devoted to architecture in the UK. It supplies an approachable and engaging introduction to the art, use and practice of architecture. There are always exhibiting models, drawings and designs, and examples of materials, as well as photographs and fragments of buildings. Moreover, there is

also a temporary exhibition space for exhibitions that express diverse aspects of the architecture accumulations.

In the past, V&A Museum had already held a plenty of architectural exhibitions. For example, it staged a contemporary architecture exhibition [19] which opened on 15th June 2010, exploring the power of small spaces. Seven international architects who are from a shortlist of nineteen were chose to create structures which consider notions of refuge and retreat. These structures which examine thematic concept such as play, work, performance and study will be constructed at full-scale in different spaces within the V&A. The V&A has commissioned seven short films which focus on the architects and the tasks. The filmed interviews with the architects about their design philosophy and their retreat concept for the V&A. Additionally, there were various architectural exhibitions ever, for instance, “Architectural Studies for the V&A”, held on 21 June to 19 September 2010; “Swarm Chandelier”, exhibited on 1 December 2007 to 9 January 2009; “Poly & Chai', installation by Yung Ho Chang”, exhibited on 2 June to 1 September 2008; “On the Threshold: The changing face of housing”, held on 2 November 2006 to 27 May 2007; “Zoomorphic” exhibited on 18 September 2003 to 4 January 2004. As a result, V&A museum is a huge historical international art and design museum which is really interested in architecture studies.

On the other hand, initially the research intended look for a museum or art gallery which with a mini garden. There is a garden in the central of V&A museum as the John Madejski Garden (Illustrations 2,3). Because the curator intended present the Kengo Kuma's work at a external space, especially a garden space. Kengo Kuma's architecture design philosophy is related to natural objects, it is better to provide a open space. This signifies the structure work integrate with the nature and it is easy make visitors feel romantic with the garden surrounded by historical museum.

Actually, the curator prefer to IKON gallery (Illustrations 5) which is located in local Birmingham. IKON is an international contemporary art venue which has develop an off-site programme to engage with individuals of all ages and abilities from communities in Birmingham and beyond. IKON's off-site programme evolves dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. And various media is exhibited, including sound, film, installation, paintings and sculptures. This small- scale art gallery is better to make a solo architectural exhibition. Moreover, in front of the gallery building, there is a small garden which with the cherry blossoms (Illustrations 6,7). What a romantic satisfied garden for the propose. However, this intention was given up. Because IKON gallery is not often interested in architecture design. Essentially, the garden is not belong to IKON gallery, it may be owned by council in a sense.

This is in part a draft of this proposal, everything can change and as a curator this event is proving that flexibility is a fundamental attribute. The new plans for Kengo Kuma at V&A Museum will happen. This exhibition will include two parts which are internal and external-John Madejski Garden and exhibition space in V&A museum. The external work will focus on powerful visual installation to attract visitors' curiosity, and the internal exhibition will relate to Kengo Kuma's architecture design philosophy. The architect's work is expected because located in this beautiful garden and surrounded by a series historical building. It is a good opportunity to express the romantic and reality, integrating the modern architecture concept to nature and culture.

### ***3.1. Synopsis Development***

It is with this background, that curator find inspiration, and it is pertinent that this proposal is a description of the effect of change on site. This is a project in two parts which is not interchangeable, the internal and external exhibition.

This exhibition will take the form of architectural installation, and is influenced on site and context specific theories. Two projects “Poly & Chai’, installation by Yung Ho Chang”, and “Traveling to the Wonderland” in V&A Museum provides a background to the thought processes that have evolved this synopsis.

This paper particularly interested in architecture exhibition and off-site installations. There is also a possibility that the architects will have to vacate the property in the future, so this piece seems more important. Thus the proposal is a opportunity for architect consider the off-site architecture installation relate to architecture design philosophy in this particular area.

### ***3.2. Off-site Curatorial Practice***

The project is informed by Deborah Kermode’s [20] discuss on the term off-sites. In recent years, a plenty of artists and institutions have engaged with site-specificity as an enterprise. Deborah Kermode states “The off-site programme bring together a unique series of projects that, at their heart, propose a more generous approach to artistic practice and are characterized by their location away from the gallery. They articulate a desire to make an art that has continuity with the physical environment, transcending the often formulaic restraints of a gallery situation, engaging with a public who may have little or no experience of art and with public spaces in which art is absolutely not the priority.” The new curatorial rhetoric emphasis on audience participate, there is the pressure on process rather than product, with important placed on ‘doing’ and participate. Its temporality and unforced fluidity place is the curatorial methodology back the off-site work.

The exhibition and biennial curator is someone who works in the spotlight is frankly clutch responsible for the response of their exhibitions. However, the new curatorial rhetoric emphasis is on flexibility, performativty, and connectivity. Many curators have evolved the curatorial practice with a curatorial methodology that has moved towards a more performative and dialogical model [4]. If enough creative curators gave enough thought to the contemporary exhibitions, the function of exhibitions possible in another way. To be specific, in contemporary architectural exhibitions, it is necessary for curators to think out more flexible curatorial methodology to break away from traditional architecture exhibition. The off-site installation work is the example to replace the obsolete spatial and material production in architectural exhibition.

Miwon Kwon means “Off-site and its related descriptions have been uncritically adopted, by artists, museums, biennials and architectural installations as a mean of validating their approaches, that is to say about work in a site but not necessarily a fundamental part or even reason for the existence of the art work.”

The new curatorial point highlight process rather than product, intermediate the exhibitions as flexible structure, bring the audience to be visitor into play. This signifies the exhibition present ‘this is how you see’ instead of ‘this is’. The viewers might have different thinkings after the interactive visit, anyway, the visitors can participate in the exhibition, instead of viewing. To control a middle course between education and amusement successfully has been at the center of curatorial idea ever since. In the issue, exhibitions has changed from the static towards dynamic[5].

My own definition of off-site in this exhibition is that if it were not for the existence of the context and integrate with the site, the installation project would not be coherent or even exist, and would mislay in the site. This proposal consider about the off-site architectural installation to make the work unify with the context, this is also a significant point to respond Kengo Kuma's architecture design concept. Moreover, there are various examples for off-site architecture installations:

"Traveling to the Wonderland" [21] (Illustrations 16,17) is a brilliant installation made by Bin Xu at V&A Museum on 2013. This is based on the Chinese fable written by the scholar Tao Qian (or Tao Yuanming, 365-427) in 421AD, about people who lead an ideal existence in harmony with nature and each other, unaware of the outside world, Xu Bing's installation is deliberately 'non-real. This dream-like landscape has been created around the central water feature of the John Madejski Garden, built up from layers of thinly-cut stones collected from five different places in China to represent mountains. Clusters of ceramic houses, each one handmade and coloured to reflect the diverse traditional styles of houses from the different provinces have been placed among the stones. For example, rocks taken from the Tai Hu Lake in the lower Yangtze River region are accompanied by houses in Suzhou garden style. The same meticulous detailing also applies to the positioning of special ceramic animals in relation to the type of stone. Modern elements have also been introduced into the landscape to represent the coexistence of ancient and new in contemporary China and remind the viewer of present, everyday life. The unification between traditional dream and modern daily life, and the integration between installation and context are satisfied by visitors.

This proposal is distinct from past architectural exhibition held at V&A Museum, it is about off-site architectural installation, also the relationship between external and internal is same significant, the curator intend that the research have an open brief to the architect and researchers can discuss about this.

The external work plan to commission architect to design a new architecture installation to respond the brief. As for internal exhibition, the curator is intending as the expand of external work [6]. The internal exhibition will break away traditional architecture exhibition to display models, drawings, plans. The emphasis is flexible, interaction, education with entertainment. The work in the exhibition space may design some small-scale installations can allow people enter it to experience the structure and install high-technology software to make architectural with nature objects by people themselves. This paper will discuss with the architect to design new work to express the architect's design philosophy. The most important thing is the coherent interaction and flexible dialogue between the architect and visitors.

### **3.3. Installations**

*"...wants to move towards a building-free architecture, in order to face society's crucial themes; it shows site-specific installations, visions and experiments that help us understand and value our modern world, feeling at ease in it, instead of presenting the graves of architecture, that is the buildings." [23] Aaron Betsky*

Installation has replaced models and professional drafts in the architecture exhibition. Architecture is not necessarily about just making buildings. This is the first challenge for 11th International Architecture Exhibition (Illustrations 20,21), its thesis is that today the building alone does not suffice for people 'at home' in modern

society. It has more to do with thinking and arguing about architecture. The exhibition presented a set of big scale installations which all questioned how curators think about architecture in modern society. In terms of this, architecture does not refer to just the building itself but is anticipated to solve various questions about investigating new demands and problems. It is like the familiar phrase ‘everything is architecture’ to a concept of ‘everything can give rise to architecture.’ It focuses on the approaches for problem-solving and strategies. This signifies the contemporary architecture exhibition has the ability to create installations rather than architecture exhibitions as documentations of constructed projects.

Installation art breaks away from traditional artistic rule especially when apply this art forms for architecture exhibition. It breaks away from the traditional architecture exhibitions which are just display plans, drawings, photography, and models. Installations are a conglomerate of forms, ideas and meaning which integrate dissimilar media and objects, as well as sensory stimuli to make a particular kind of unity. For instance, “Sensing Spaces: Architecture Reimagined” (Illustrations 14,15) transformed by a series of installation, and the audience will respond to diverse structures, textures, lighting, scents and colours.

Additionally, a subjective model of space played a important role in installation art. “The spatial relationships and the context connected with place are reflected in the polyphonicity of the form of the installation. The function of place and space might be different, but they are always important.” [24] This demonstrates the context has the crucial state in installation art, the most superficial influence is if the installation’s size suitable to the space. Moreover, the more deeply effect is the installation located in specific site meanings the particular concept- that is site-specific artworks. For example, the Japanese architect Kengo Kuma made a installation “Nangchang Nangchang bamboo installation” [25] (Illustrations 8,9,10) in Gwangju Design Biennale in South Korea. Kengo Kuma spilt the bamboo into three-centimetre-wide strips to make it easy yo bend, so visitors to Gwangju Design Biennale can walk over or reline on the springy surfaces. This is the specific installation to respond the biennale site and express the concept.

Although there is a blurred boundary to define installation in different artists’ concept, especially in the architecture concept. Some installations must be portrayed exactly in conformity with thedenotation of artists and architects in an accurate shape which is inflexible. Other installations are open to explanation and are variable and dependent on the style of presentation and context [7].

As a result, this proposal intend to commission a large-scale installation in John Madejski Garden at V&A Museum, through installation work the interaction between the work and viewer is the important thing in architectural exhibition. In display a installation work in architectural exhibition, the curator needs proposal that direct the architects’ purpose, the material and context, and the unity of installation. The aim is to make general audience can participate in the architecture imagination and understand the architects’ values [8].

### **3.4. Kengo Kuma**

Kengo Kuma is one of international famous architects. Kengo Kuma is a famous architect who good use of environmental features for the design, as he did in China’s most well-known work under the Great Wall Commune • bamboo, and its representative Suntory Museum, lotus house, water / glass. These works which are

related to Asian tradition and nature, reflect the deep intellection on the building and its architectural notion of development, the building itself is not limited, but is more focused on architecture and human relationship with nature. He states “Architecture of the body's own existence is shameful and I want ambiguous outline of the building, that is, make the building disappear.” [26] This signifies individuals always carved out the building out of the environment, people forgot the architecture is aim people to go in and make people live better, people ignore the surrounded environment and comfortable life, people blindly architecture as ‘objets’. However, architecture is not necessarily about just making building.

Moreover, Kengo Kuma often be commissioned to design large-scale architecture installations to respond the brief of exhibition with his own architecture philosophy. For instance, Kengo Kuma’s installations are involved in the current architecture exhibition at Royal Academy of Arts “Sensing spaces:Architecture Reimagined” in London. The bamboo have whittled into four-millimetre fronds in a dark. That sounds like the worst additional of public-art drivel, but when designed with a Zen-master mentality, it becomes amazing and calm. Additionally, Kuma plays with changing light and crosses the final sensual border for designers: smell. The inspiration of installation is from the Japanese scents of hinoki and tatami. Another example, “Two carps” [27] (Illustrations 11,12,13) is the exhibition located at Padova, Italy in 2007. The architect Kengo Kuma made a set of installations to respond the commission for transform the massive empty space into a metaphor of a Japanese garden in such a significant historical space as “Palazzo della Ragione di Padova” is. A backlit path would lead the visitors like in a garden through the diverse built pavilions, and dialogue with it through some crucial detail of the existing architecture and make it guide to become a incredible experience. This means, Kengo Kuma is a good choice has the ability and possible for the architecture exhibition to design a off-site large-scale installation at V&A Museum.

Additionally, there is another reason for Kengo Kuma to make an solo architecture exhibition at V&A Museum. Kengo Kuma’ architecture design won the selection by an international jury as the choice for the V&A at Dundee(Illustrations 4) following an extensive process of consultation and evaluation, including meeting with all the architects and their teams, visiting their existing buildings, and establishing the feasibility of the project to meet the tight timescales and budget. This is a sufficient reason for Kengo Kuma’s solo exhibition at V&A Museum to celebrate this stunning architecture is confirmed. This is a good opportunity for visitors to understand this architecture and the architect Kengo Kuma, and there is the more close relationship between Kengo Kuma and V&A Museum.

### ***3.5. Funding and Marketing***

A number of projects will be undertaken by curator and the architect, but the management and arrangement of external and internal will be undertake by professionals to ensure quality of finish, and that they have adequate insurance in place as to provide the museum gallery committee with a guarantee. The V&A Museum will provide a plenty of people who can help display and arrange the event. The curator hope the Kengo Kuma & Associates and V&A Museum will support a certain amount of funding to keep this exhibition. If it is necessary the addition sponsor will be invited. Everything should be paid except a bank of volunteers who are willing to assist for free.

The research intend to print private cards for visual marketing and invitations. The exhibition will also be advertised on the V&A Museum, and Social Networking Service like facebook and wechat presence being evolved. The research will announced the exhibition on wechat. Hopping V&A Museum can product a booklet to collect all information for exhibition and the architect. For the exhibition, the curator plan to make a form of small brochure to explain the work.

The research would like to produce a blog diary which is a significant form for documentation in a sense. The blog diary will collect the investigation, dialogue, discussion between curator and architect. At the same time this will be published in architect's limited edition book as a memorial object of the design experience [9].

In term of this is a solo exhibition, a very particular relationship and exchange starts the moment an artist begins working on a project with curator, just like the Matt's gallery [28] which is interested in solo exhibition. Over the following steps a conversation and dialogue unfolds that narrates and create the ways that the work develops. There is a more close relationship between museum, curator and architect. It is no longer sufficient for curator to be concerned with the artwork alone, the architects or artists have a crucial and ongoing involvement, and it is curator's role to negotiate between architects' or artists' needs and the institutional requirement [10]. For this solo exhibition, The research intend produce a publication and invite Kate Goodwin who is the curator of "Sensing spaces: Architecture Reimagined" to write a paper to attract visitors. Because Kate Goodwin has the deep understanding with Kengo Kuma when she curated the "Sensing spaces: Architecture Reimagined" exhibition. This is significant to introduce the architect and exhibition, also the dialogue between Kate Goodwin and Kengo Kuma can make people know more about the concept of exhibition and architecture design. The whole process refers to the site, from the initial promotion and this is appropriate negotiated to the process and context of exhibition.

### **3.6. Security**

The exhibition is open to public and there is a external installation, so the invigilation and security is definitely significant. Hopeful the V&A Museum will provide professional security to enable this during the exhibition. Moreover, there is welcome for a bank of volunteers for free to keep the security both in external and internal exhibition space.

## **4. Conclusions**

The aim of this proposal are twofold, to provide a sense of emotion of architecture design philosophy from Kengo Kuma and provide a new discussion on curating architecture exhibition [11]. Internal being the studios as a place for interaction and knowledge for architect's architecture concept development. The external involves the changing spaces around the site and effects that re-evolvment will have on the internal projects. The proposal is that through Kengo Kuma's architecture work to expose the coherent interactive relationship between the inside and outside works. To express the famous architect's work is important, however, the more important point is discuss the new concept about curating architecture exhibition. The new curatorial rhetoric emphasis is on flexibility, performativty, and connectivity. This notion of curatorial practice highlight process rather than product, intermediate the exhibitions as flexible structure, bring the audience to be visitor into play. This signifies the

relationship between works and visitors, and the relationship between education and entertainment are more and more significant in curatorial discussion subject.

Additionally, the thematic demand for visitors plays a relevant role on contemporary exhibition. Individuals are willing to live in a better society and planet to satisfy their inspiration world. The dream of living in natural environment with natural objects can be realized. The reason and sensibility are not always opposite. To integrate rational and romantic, make people see the world full of truth, or the integrity of architecture.

Thus, contemporary curatorial practice has presented more new questions for curators to consider about them. More or less, today this is in the midst of a new golden age of the exhibition. There are more exhibitions than ever before, especially architectural exhibitions and with new exhibitions constantly opening for short intervals and they are playing an increasingly central and popular role in people's lives. Hence, modern architecture has no lesser value than a sculpture or a painting and needs to be explored through direct experience. People are hope to understand more about architecture which is our living space and 'enter' the imaginative architecture even they can not be built in reality currently. Architectural exhibitions not only show functional architectural work but work that is connected and relates to contemporary art and design. The question is not about who the architects are but simply how to produce, discuss, debate, and circulate concepts to various audiences expressing innovative ideas and articulations proposed by architects which are prevalent in contemporary society.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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